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ABSTRACT

The system of education in the United States mirrors, creates, and legitimates inequalities of the larger society that supports it. Legally required schooling ranks, sorts, and prepares children for the "real world," and contributes to social maintenance rather than to social change by stressing the "correctness" of some features of English and by rigidly stigmatizing other features prominent in the language of lower-class children. The "back to basics" movement fosters the illusion of merit and sustains competition as an avenue to upward mobility by concentrating public attention on the basics most easily measured by standardized tests. English teachers concerned about social justice, education, and their own integrity might use the following suggestions in dealing with the situation: learn how standard languages have arisen, been exploited, and how they relate to other dialects; learn how much of standard English is truly useful and how much is merely stylistic or even dysfunctional; oppose standardized testing; examine the ideologies of merit, competition, and upward mobility; and seek to raise the social and political consciousness of students and to heighten their rhetorical awareness of the ways language is used either to liberate or to oppress. (DF)

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STANDARD ENGLISH, SOCIAL MOBILITY, AND THE IDEOLOGY OF MERIT*

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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> It is time that we had uncommon schools, that we did not leave off our education when we begin to be men and women.
>
> Thoreau, Walden

> The strongest man is never strong enough to be always master, unless he transforms his power into right and obedience into duty.
>
> Rousseau

If it is true that every age is an age of transition, then it is also true that the now-more-than-ever rhetoric has been heard so often amid perpetual crisis that the speaker's sense of urgency only annoys. English teachers who survived the calamitous sixties and suffered into the gray years of steady state enrollment, of headcounts and FTE's, have likely been undisturbed by the "literacy crisis" by which Edwin Newman, John Simon, Jean Stafford, and a host of academics have proclaimed their discovery that students do not write very well. This "discovery" (is there an antonym for "eureka"?) is less interesting than the range of responses and catalogue of causes that the discoverers do not shrink from providing. While it would no doubt be useful to analyze the political purposes that gave rise to the "discovery" and the insidious purposes to which the crisis has been put, my reflections are considerably more modest: I propose to examine only one aspect of the circumstances in which English is now taught, an elusive set of assumptions about what is required for students to "get along" in our society. My remarks are variations on a theme so simple and obvious that I blush to state it so boldly: education is

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politics. American education is American politics. Every educational act is a political act, reflecting and serving political values. Teachers of "standard" languages are inextricably enmeshed in social and political values and conflicts.

Despite our obsession with modernity and our sense of historical uniqueness, we must surely recognize the modernity of earlier views of American education. Writing in 1909, Ellwood P. Cubberley, a professor at Stanford, notes wistfully that the world of his childhood is no more.

> The church has lost its influence over the young, frequently they give it only a nominal allegiance, and many children grow up today without any religious training. The little homogeneous community with its limited outlook and its clannish outlook is fast being displaced by semi-urban conditions, a much more cosmopolitan population, and a much freer and an easier life. The apprentice system has practically gone. The amusements and temptations of life have been greatly multiplied. The attitude of the people toward the old problems has greatly changed. Parents everywhere are less strict than they used to be, and the attitude of many communities today, as expressed in their life, their newspapers, and their failure to enforce the law, is really opposed to righteousness and good behavior. The home altogether too often is unintelligent or neglectful in the handling of children, and not infrequently it has abdicated entirely and has turned over to the public school the whole matter of the training and education of the young.[1]

Ages and ages hence we can read this with a sigh, for Cubberley's scenario is ragtime Future Shock: earlier he had spoken of the "knowledge explosion"; the old moral order, once supported by church and home, is being shaken by new ideas; the education of the young has been surrendered to the public schools; the ladder of success grows ever more slippery. Writing in the first issue of English Journal, W. D. Lewis laments the sad state of literacy. His ears sting

> from a chorus of complaints from the colleges and the business-men to whom our students go at the end of the high-school course. We find, for instance, that Harvard University thinks it necessary to send out to the schools a pamphlet stating the most flagrant errors in English among its Freshmen.... The colleges cannot sufficiently condemn our product so far as its training in English is concerned. Businessmen tell us that our graduates cannot write a decent letter, that they are unable to spell and punctuate acceptably; in short, their anathemas are fully as vigorous as are those of the colleges.[2]

In the next issue of the journal, another teacher of composition sees the whole society lurching into the Age of Dullness, with the only light still flickering in the shaky hands of English teachers.

> We are no longer a Bible-reading people; the church and Sunday School are fast losing their hold; family life is less intimate and watchful; respect for law and order is decreasing while forces of evil are steadily multiplying in our midst. The moving pictures and the vaudevilles, cheap and commonplace if not immoral, the trashy magazine, the daily newspaper with its scandal and vulgar comic supplement are but a few of the agencies at work which have already helped to bring about a cheapening of ideals, a lowering of standards, and a blunting of fine sensibilities and distinctions, already ominously perceptible in our American people, both man and youth.[3]

All of the satanic forces, I hasten to add, were affecting high schools and society in an age when, according to a contemporary account, only 86 of one thousand students who began elementary school graduated from high school.[4] So much for the good old days.

What is to be done in such evil times? Cubberley's foresight is as keen as his hindsight, so he envisioned and as a school administrator and social planner worked for a society in which the public schools engineer a perilous harmony between social classes.

> The school is essentially a time and labor saving device, created--with us--by democracy to serve democracy's needs....The school must grasp the significance of its social connections and relations, and must come to realize that its real worth and its hope of adequate reward lies in its social efficiency....With the ever increasing

> subdivision and specialization of labor, the danger from class subdivision is constantly increasing, and the task is thrown more and more upon the school of instilling into all a social and political consciousness that will lead to unity amid diversity, and to united action for the preservation and betterment of our democratic institutions. (pp. 54, 55)

Stripped of Independence Day rhetoric, the purpose of American education, he says, is to prevent class warfare. Schools accomplish this mission efficiently by inculcating a particular political and social consciousness. State-supported education supports the state. And lest this talk of political consciousness sound like the early wall posters of Mao's widow, I should emphasize that Cubberley is quite typical of his age (and ours): his views are consistent with the dominant values of his age, and from such views our own age has derived its understanding of its problems and purposes. Given Cubberley's confident assertion that a particular social and political consciousness would save the day, we might sensibly ask whose values would inform that consciousness, how those values would be legitimated, and what purposes would be served by such values.

The rise of corporate capitalism at the turn of the century has been adequately traced in the hagiography and folklore of American tycoons--Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Carnegie--and the impact of their values on public education discloses their features as clearly as the busts in any board room.[5] Industry needed workers who were obedient, punctual, and reliable, and the schools efficiently prepared young people to be employees. That employees were widely exploited is apparent from any survey of American history, and the bloody histories of the American labor movement dramatize only the most spectacular abuses. The existence of massive inequality of income and wealth could be explained, justified, and perpetuated by reference to the talismanic concepts of

merit, competition, and social mobility, all of which could be mediated through schooling. This trinity embodies the primary articles of faith that underlay the extraordinary economic development--and rapacity--of modern corporations in the utilities, petroleum, and steel industries in particular. Indeed, the concept of social mobility is deeply implicated in Americans' desire to get and spend, a passion noted by de Tocqueville nearly two centuries ago. In America, he noted, "The first thing that strikes one... is the innumerable crowd of those striving to escape from their original social condition...Every American is eaten up with longing to rise...All are constantly bent on gaining property, reputation, and power."[6] The wealthy achieved their cachet through their native abilities, hard work and persistence; at least this is the popular mythology.

In the social Darwinism of the era, the wealthy were "the fittest," and even if most children could more reasonably expect to become president than a member of the Rockefeller family, it was still prudent for their parents and teachers to teach them that the most industrious and most capable, like Gatsby, could achieve wealth.

A powerful fiction is thus created, and this fiction takes on explanatory power. It explains that because schooling was ostensibly open to all and because school offered to all the opportunity to acquire an education that led to success, one's position in society "could be portrayed as the result not of birth, but of one's own efforts and talents."[7] Rich and poor, strong and weak, blueblood and immigrant--all were to be subject to this natural law. The notions of merit and competition could be used to explain widespread failure and thus rationally consign the vast majority of children, especially

minority, immigrant, and lower-class children, to jobs with limited futures and meager wages. The challenge was to convince most students to lower their aspirations rather than to question the basis on which privilege was denied or bestowed. Thus, "if a person is convinced that he is not able to do well, he is less likely to rise up against the social system than if he believes that the system is unfair and based on class."[8] What could be fairer than an assessment of ability, one that yields a two-or three-digit number, by which students are rank ordered? The hat-trick is to convince people not only that the principles of merit are uniformly applied (that is, there is equal opportunity for all) but that the principles themselves validly assess the "suitability" of particular persons for particular activities.

One of the most powerful methods for stratifying students is the standardized test. Indeed, the notion of "standard" is itself richly ambiguous, suggesting both a norm from which deviations are measured and a measuring rod that itself merits respect. The rise of standardized testing, supported heavily by major American philanthropic foundations, has a long history of "explaining" economic differences between race and social class by anatomizing physiological differences.[9] In the nineteenth century, an American scientist, Samuel George Morton, sought to explain human differences by comparing the cranial capacities of different ethnic groups. Among nineteenth-century anthropologists, a favorite sport was the ranking of cultures and races by one criterion or another, so the craniometrists (not to be confused with their vulgar kinsmen, the phrenologists) measured the heads of millions of Americans, establishing elaborate classifications of race in order of perceived merit. It may not be entirely coincidental that the scientist's own ethnic group inevitably

came out on top and that enslaved or defeated groups were on the bottom. The craniometrists compared the length and width of the cranium and calculated the degree to which jaws jutted but found certitude of measurement only in brain weight, few scientists doubting that brain size correlated with intelligence. Professor Morton, dean of American craniometrists, found that he could rank not only races but nationalities of the same race, "discovering" that Caucasians had greatest cranial capacity and that among Caucasians the English were highest, followed by Germans and Americans. Native American, Mexican, and Negro skulls had substantially less cranial capacity than Caucasian skulls, explaining quite clearly why so few of their races had succeeded in American life. Morton's finagling of his evidence suggests not only that preposterous ideas can be quite convincing if presented with proper "scientific" panache (Emerson, after all, believed in the Cardiff giant) but that the "history of scientific views on race is a mirror of social beliefs among the privileged."[10]

Without belaboring the interconnections between "scientific" thinking about race, social Darwinism, and schooling, I should note briefly that the twentieth century, while lacking the good-humored lunacy of the craniometrists, has supplied numerous researchers who confuse science and politics, commingling their hopes and their evidence. Sir Francis Galton, a British researcher who made significant contributions to several branches of science, unabashedly championed racism in his works on eugenics. In America, Lewis Terman, one of the leading forces in the institutionalization of intelligence testing in American schools, concluded in 1916 that the intellectual dullness he observed in Chicanos, Indians, and Blacks

> seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they come. The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans, and negroes suggests quite forcibly that the whole question of racial differences in mental traits will have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods. The writer predicts that when this is done, there will be discovered enormously significant racial differences in general intelligence, differences which cannot be wiped out by any scheme or mental culture. Children of this group should be segregated in special classes and be given instruction which is concrete and practical. They cannot master abstractions, but they can often be made efficient workers, able to look out for themselves. There is no possibility at present of convincing society that they should not be allowed to reproduce, although from a eugenic point of view they constitute a grave problem because of their unusually prolific breeding.[11]

Sir Cyril Burt's famous studies of twins, which provided Arthur Jensen with theoretical support in his study of the heritability of intelligence, are now regarded with dire suspicion since he appears not only to have falsified data but to have cloned fictional "associates" (Margaret Howard and J. Conway) whose independent "research" supported his work.[12] From standardized testing to craniometry to eugenics to fraud is a tortuous path through science and politics, statistical legerdemain and statistical nonsense. But the founders of standardized testing had at least one virtue: their motives were quite clear. They wanted to promote "efficiency" by stratifying students in a superficially "objective" manner.

The class and racial bias prominent in standardized tests, particularly of I.Q., has been well know from the very beginning. Nearly sixty years ago, George Counts clearly described and explained the massive failure of students to persist in public education as a function of race, nationality, and class.[13] In 1908, Thorndike, who provided much of the direction in educational psychology, noted that blacks and other minorities were disproportionately "eliminated"

from the schools. That this result was anything but the inevitable outcome of a meritocratic system was not questioned by the government (Thorndike noted, however, that "a system in which laziness and stupidity eliminate pupils is better than one in which they are eliminated by poverty," p. 7). The schools mirrored divisions and stratification in society, forming a pyramid very narrow at the top and very broad at the base. As economist Samuel Bowles concludes, "the close relationship between educational attainments and later occupational success thus provides a meritocratic appearance to mask the mechanisms which reproduce the class system from generation to generation."[14]

Since schooling is required by law, children will necessarily be ranked, sorted, and prepared for delivery to the "real world," a world in which we find extraordinarily real differences in status and power. Such preparation for "real" life through tracking, ability grouping, and so on becomes more "efficient" if "objective" tests stratify the students. Students are told that social mobility is the reward for successful competition and that success in school leads to success in the world. But the connection is not nearly so simple or direct as this, one economist even concluding that "the function of education is not to confer skill and therefore increased productivity and higher wages on the worker; it is rather to certify his 'trainability' and to confer upon him a certain status by virtue of this certification. Jobs and higher incomes are then distributed on the basis of this certified status."[15] In fact, most job skills are obtained after the student has obtained the position: jobs are <u>not</u> the result of learning particular skills in school. Of college graduates, for example, only 12% listed formal training or specialized courses as sources of skills they use in their work.[16]

If schools certify trainability, thereby reducing training costs for employers

who would otherwise have to use criteria besides the evidence of "merit" provided by schools, then they become an inexpensive, defensible and "objective" screening device for employers, even if the relation of education and wealth (remember that through work comes social mobility) is not causal. Ivar Berg observes that today "employers frequently require educational credentials that have little to do with actual job requirements"[17] while other employers have raised educational requirements for jobs whose duties have not changed. Likewise, some jobs "were being performed in 1960 by people with less schooling than those who held the same jobs in 1940, and others by people with more."[18] While it is true that children today are more likely than their parents to have white-collar jobs, there are both absolutely and relatively more such jobs.[19]

In light of these data, what happens to the "upward mobility" carrot dangled before children (and their parents) as the reward of successful educational experience and substantial modification (for some) of language, values, and mores?[20] The carrot jumps unpredictably as the job/school relationships change and the schools maintain distance between the goal and its pursuer. Many more students now complete high school than ever before and begin college, but the tracking or stratifying of students, a prominent feature of public school education since the 1920's, has now become institutionalized in higher education as well.[21] With the creation of the community college system in most states, a new track ostensibly offers students either a chance to acquire vocational skills that lead to employment or to follow another tributary into the "mainstream." Though generally regarded as the expression of an open and egalitarian system of higher education, the community college, according to several critics, is not egalitarian at all. It is instead "a prime contemporary expression of the dual historical patterns of class-based

tracking and of education inflation.... The community college is itself the bottom track of the system of higher education in both class origins and occupational destinations of its students."[22] Other critics call the community collge an intricately engineered mechanism for structuring and concealing the mass failure of the academically non-gifted student. What one calls "structured failure" another terms "cooling out," the process of convincing a student (through entrance tests, remedial courses, "vocational" counseling, systems of probation and suspension and so on) that continuance toward a degree is inappropriate without seeming to deny the student educational opportunity.[23]

But the community college is not the only "track" on which this race is run. The performance of students in many introductory courses at large universities supports the claim that the function of such courses is not to teach but to stratify, to "weed out," to cull the "college material" from the rest. In the collision between students and the faculty, the conflict may stem not so much from the students' "low standards" and the professors' "high standards" but from the aspirations of students who seek upward mobility in a pyramidal system that is purposely narrow at the top. "Academic standards," writes Jerome Karabel, "are located in the midst of this conflict and serve as a 'covert' mechanism, which...enables the university to 'do the dirty work for the rest of society.'"[24] "Cooling out" or "structuring failure" is a successful strategy for stratifying students because it legitimates as it sorts, the system of sorting appearing so fair that students blame themselves rather than the system. The attrition in community colleges and large state universities during the first three semesters is very high, leaving students convinced that they had had their "chance" but had failed.[25] Merit vincit omnia.

Contemporary views of how school and marketplace work together to "remedy" inequality can be seen in the many forums that debate economic and social policy, but a particularly telling example of "received wisdom" on the matter can be seen in popular college textbooks. One should notice, for example, how an economic text now in its sixth edition summarizes the moral foundations of the marketplace:

> The price system is an impersonal mechanism, and the distribution of income to which it gives rise may entail more inequality than society desires. The market system yields very large incomes to those whose labor, by virtue of inherent ability and acquired education and skills, commands high wages. Similarly, those who possess--by virture of hard work or easy inheritance--valuable capital and land receive large property incomes. But others in our society have less ability and receive modest amounts of education and training. And these same people typically have accumulated or inherited no property resources. Hence, their incomes are very low....There is considerable debate about whether the government has sufficiently reduced income inequality and provided a minimum standard of living for all its citizens.[26]

Several aspects of this fiction merit comment, since this view is typical of explanations offered by many contemporary economists and politicians. First, the price system is said to be "impersonal," ignoring the widespread success of individuals and corporations in manipulating prices in a way that quite personally benefits them and injures others. This "impersonal" quality supports the fiction of "objectivity" and "merit" as determinants of success in "real-world competition." Second, McConnell asserts that inequality of income may be more extreme than society "desires." Putting aside the abstraction of "society," we might ask "Who desires inequality, and how much inequality do they desire?" Do their desires have limits?[27] Third, McConnell links ability to education and education to income (and thus to social mobility), ignoring that the actual relationship is nowhere that simple.[28] Fourth, the severe inequality of wealth and income

seems to be the result of competition in the marketplace, an expression of raw social Darwinism.[29] As we sow, so shall we reap. Finally, the delicious litotes of McConnell's final sentence needs no further analysis: the understatement makes quite clear the relationship among principles, policies, and problems.

In summary, then, it seems reasonable to argue that the system of education in this country mirrors, creates, and legitimates inequalities of the larger society that supports it. In light of such a system--and it is in such a system that English is taught--classroom instruction in English has a small but significant role.

> Jack woud be a gentilman if he coude speke frensshe.
> --Medieval proverb.

> The essential fact in English usage is that some people don't approve of the way other people speak. Finding a valid defense for this disapproval has been difficult.
> --Robert C. Pooley, The Teaching of English Usage (Urbana: NCTE, 1974, p. 15)

In quest of a "valid" defense for disapproval of their students' language, English teachers have embraced a set of language prejudices and assumptions about dialects and usage that usually suffice for any defense they offer to themselves or to their students. The most common defense is that usage is either correct or incorrect; correct usage is "standard English," and if the usage is not standard, then it must be incorrect. Q.E.D. Standard English, they might say, is the collection of linguistic forms and structures most suitable for conducting education and substantial matters of public life and is thus a requirement for "escaping from (one's) original social condition." Unlike in Britain, whose "standard" evolved from a regional dialect to a class dialect,

the American Standard is thought to be free of class prejudices, but in fact the widely accepted definitions of "standard English" emphasize that the status of linguistic forms is "determined by the standing of their users in the community"[30] and not by anything inherent in the language. Charles C. Fries' classic definition of standard English in American English Grammar is even more explicit: standard English is standard, he says, "solely because it is the particular type of English which is used in the conduct of the important affairs of our people. It is also the type of English used by the socially acceptable [emphasis added] of most of our communities and insofar as that is true it has become a social or class dialect in the United States."[31] Using a single variety of English as a norm means favoring the group of people speaking that variety, writes Einar Haugen. "It gives them prestige as norm-bearers, and a headstart in the race for power and position."[32] As overt class markers disappear, more subtle ones replace them, and English is capable of infinitely subtle nuances for linguistically stratifying its users. Our language, as Frederick Williams notes, is a powerful reminder to ourselves and others of "social and ethnic boundaries, and is thus a part of the process of social maintenance (or change)."[33]

Without putting too fine a point on it, my argument is that schools contribute not to social change but to social maintenance by stressing the "correctness" of some features of English and rigidly stigmatizing other features prominent in the language of lower-class children. Further, I maintain that the language of children reflects and regulates the relationships among students and between students and their teachers. The research on the social status of varieties of American English powerfully shows the consequences of minute variations in phonology, intonation, syntax, or lexicon. Through language, students exhibit--

and perhaps determine--their place in school and society.[34]

An extensive body of research supports the hypothesis that evaluational reactions to speech are a stereotyped or generalized version of attitudes toward those who use that speech.[35] In Britain, Canada, Israel, Australia, and America, researchers have found that listeners evaluate and rank speakers by their dialect, arousing expectations about the suitability of that person for employment, friendship, or educational achievement. The link between the students' language variety and their teachers' academic expectations of them has been experimentally confirmed, suggesting that even in the absence of "standardized" test scores, children are stratified on the basis of their dialect.[36] To the extent that teachers form their academic expectations and social judgments by the English their students use, they perpetuate language assumptions and class values that enshrine social distinctions based on minute language differences and enforce prevailing systems of inequality. In essence, this approach to students through their language confirms the association between types of speech and types of people. Since it may not be "desirable" or "useful" (i.e., conducive to social mobility) to be perceived as one of "these" people, the classroom strategy is to remove the stigmatized feature(s) in hopes of disguising stigmatized people; alternatively, students are rewarded if they bring to school "prestige" markers in their language.

Traditionally, English teachers have accepted without question the notions that through competition merit will surface and be rewarded and that such competition is "fair" to all participants. A corollary is that each student should fully develop his or her potential, assuming that teachers can "know" that potential and recognize when it is being fully developed. Thus, we sanction tests

of all sorts, establish complex grading and tracking procedures, and feel comforted that the "sifting" serves some justifiable social purpose. A common platitude is that such treatment prepares students for the "real world," but such a position also assumes that the "real world," meaning the status quo, is the only world for which it is sensible to prepare students or the only world toward which society should work.

To put it another way, the "real world," with all of its lethal practices and blatant injustice, is the world supported and created by rigid class distinctions. Upward mobility is the result, we are told, of successful competition. But such "competition," which is not competition at all since its results were known before the contest began, confirms only what the competition is designed to confirm: children of privilege inherit and schools preserve for them a tremendous advantage over the children of non-privileged families.

The currect "back to basics" movement concentrates public attention on "the basics" most easily measured by standardized tests. New standardized tests have been created especially in response to the literacy "crisis," their authors dangerously oversimplifying the content of education, poorly matching schools' programs and test content, effectually restricting the focus of schools to cognitive objectives, and inadequately responding to questions about their validity, administration, and cultural bias. Further, the results will no doubt be misused and misinterpreted. The tests will measure only cognitive skills, and in doing so, will implicitly answer the question, "what cognitive skills are important?" The tests will not assess moral growth, creativity, problem-solving, leadership, or the like; they will not reflect directly either the teacher's perceptions or community concerns. The results, however, will be published in local newspapers,

often with separate scores for white, black, and brown children, suggesting that the economic stratification visible in most communities is "caused" by the stratification of ability. One might ask some time what purpose is served by subdividing scores by race--a common practice, for example, in newspapers--and if it is a good purpose, why not also group children's scores by sex and religion and neighborhood, comparing the performance, say, of Baptists and Methodists? Since it has been amply demonstrated that standardized tests do not adequately measure what many children, especially minority children, know, then we must ask again what purposes are served by using them in this manner.[37]

The answer is that standardized tests--from the SRA to the SAT--foster the illusion of merit and sustain "competition" as avenues to upward mobility. These tests successfully deflect attention from historically rooted inequalities in the distribution of income, wealth, power, and privilege in our society. The ideology of merit and competition further diverts attention from the failure of schools and focuses on the failure of children, whose dismal performance has been variously attributed to defective intelligence, defective language, understimulation in the home, overstimulation in the home, the mother's language, the father's absence, the neighborhood structure, and so on.

How we approach "the" problem I describe depends to a large extent on how "the" problem is defined. For teachers of English, I suggest "the" problem is not just the student's awkward or partial command of a clique language that we call "Standard English." The problem of the teacher is not the problem of the student, nor is it the principal's or the school board's or the university's. In the cycle of poverty and education on which politicians wax eloquent, American society has insisted that "the" solution is most likely to be found in education and

not at the other end of the phrase. In other words, the problem of intergenerational transmission of poverty is to be addressed through instruction in grammar, composition, and literature. This idea is neither new nor likely to succeed, since teacher expectations and the stratified school environment are more powerful determinants of achievement than the content of instruction.

Panaceas are not possible, and there are no easy answers for teachers concerned about their own integrity, social justice, and education. But it is possible to see some approaches that might be helpful. First, it is necessary for English teachers to understand how standard languages came to be, how they have been used and exploited, what makes them standard, and how the varieties of English within the classroom developed and are used. There is some evidence that students who learn about the variety of dialects in this country reduce their language prejudice,[38] but relatively little work on American social class and language use has been done.[39] Moreover, we need to understand much more clearly how much of "standard English" is "useful for the main work of analyzing and generalizing and how much is merely stylistic--or even dysfunctional."[40] When Labov wrote these remarks a decade ago, he was asking a serious question, but to my knowledge it has not been answered or even considered as a research problem. Even in a longitudinal study like Language Development: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve (Urbana: NCTE, 1976) the question is not seriously considered. Walter Loban describes the development of children's language over a twelve-year period, showing quite clearly that children who are rated as successful in using the language are drawn from the most favored socioeconomic conditions,[41] such conclusions surprising no one. But then he quotes sympathetically a discussion by Millicent Poole, who had asked whether middle-

class styles of Australian speech are inherently more effective than nonstandard styles or simply different:

> If they are more effective, the assumption made by the present investigator--probably a heavily value-laden assumption--is that it is desirable and necessary for some students to change so they may gain access to a wider range of linguistic, cognitive, and verbal strategies. This stance assumes, maybe falsely, that the types of intellectual skills which ensure, for example, success at school be fostered in all children.[42]

As Loban considers reasons that poor children's language "develops" so slowly, he wanders off the map of linguistic knowledge: there has been insufficient research on how language is actually used in homes, on the significance of different kinds of "feedback" in language development, on the importance of adult models in language learning, and so on. Such research needs to be done, for Labov's question needs a more careful answer than Loban provides.

Third, teachers should oppose standardized testing for reasons outlined earlier in this essay. The political purposes to which testing has been and can be put render such tests of dubious classroom value. The mystique of "standardized" tests--a mystique that stems largely from the ignorance of teachers and the public about how tests are made, normed, financed, interpreted, and used--should be shattered, and in fact small, poorly financed groups within the profession (CLAC is a noteworthy example) raise their Lilliputian cry.

Finally, the ideology of merit, spurious notions of competition, and naive beliefs in social mobility need to be examined more extensively. Such an examination does not assume that students do not have different abilities or are equally capable in all skills; it does recognize that schools have inherited a mythology about upward mobility and definitions of merit that seriously distort the social realities that shape the lives of students just as they had shaped the lives of their

parents. Richard Ohmann argues that English classes should seek to raise the social and political consciousness of their students and heighten rhetorical awareness of the way language is used either to liberate or to oppress.[43] That seems like a reasonable place to start.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Changing Conceptions of Education (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1909), pp. 17-18.

[2]"The Aim of the English Course," English Journal (January, 1912).

[3]Emma J. Breck, "A New Task for the English Teacher," English Journal (February, 1912), 68.

[4]Edward L. Thorndike, The Elimination of Pupils from School (Washington: Bureau of Education, 1907), no. 4, p. 25.

[5]See Michael Katz, Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools (New York: Praeger, 1971); Michael Katz, The Irony of Early School Reform (New York: David McKay, 1972); Martin Carnoy, Education As Cultural Imperialism (New York: David McKay, 1974); David Tyack, The One Best System (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly, ed., Education and Colonialism (New York: Longman, 1978). For a repudiation of the assumptions shared by these authors and a critique of their methods, see Diane Ravitch, The Revisionists Revisited: A Critique of the Radical Attack on the Schools (New York: Basic Books, 1978). It is by no means incidental that Ravitch's own "upward mobility" is the subject of an article in The Chronicle Review (October 16, 1978), p. 15. For non-historical and non-statistical accounts of the class biases in education, see Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, The Hidden Injuries of Class (New York: Vintage, 1972) and an extraordinary book written collectively by the schoolboys of Barbiana, Letter to a Teacher, trans. Nora Rossi and Tom Cole (New York: Vintage, 1971).

[6]Cited in Murray Milner, Jr., The Illusion of Equality (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1972), p. 8.

[7]Samuel Bowles, "Unequal Education and the Reproduction of the Social Division of Labor" in Power and Ideology in Education, ed. Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 139.

[8]Martin Carnoy, Education as Cultural Imperialism (New York: David McKay, 1974), p. 253.

[9]For the role of philanthropic foundations in the rise of standardized testing, see Caroline Hodges Persell, Education and Inequality (New York: Free Press, 1977), pp. 57 - 58 and Martin Carnoy, Education as Cultural Imperialism, p. 245.

[10]Stephen Jay Gould, "The Finagle Factor," Human Nature (July, 1978), 87. See also Charles H. Lyons, "The Colonial Mentality: Assessment of the Intelligence of Blacks and of Women in Nineteenth Century America" in Education and Colonialism, ed. Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly (New York: Longman, 1978), pp. 181-206.

[11]Lewis Terman, The Measurement of Intelligence (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1916), pp. 92-93.

[12]Persell, p. 73. See also Nicholas Wade, "IQ and Heredity: Suspicion of Fraud Beclouds Classic Experiment," Science (November 26, 1976), 906-19.

[13]George C. Counts, The Selective Character of American Education (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922). In Leonard P. Ayres, Laggards in Our Schools (New York: Survey Associates, 1913), the author studies the attrition of students from schools, using the factory metaphor as the basis of his analysis: "A factory is most efficient when it is being worked to its full capacity. As rises or falls the relation of finished produce to raw materials, so rise and fall profits and dividends. These principles of manufacturing economics are the impelling forces that explain the vigilant care with which managers and owners watch these variable features and the painstaking exactness with which they state them in the annual reports of mercantile corporations. In vivid contrast to this condition is the lack of definite information available in the field of educational administration with respect to the degree of efficiency in the use of our educational plants" (p. 49). Ayres observed striking differences in the persistence of different ethnic groups but ascribed the differences in factory "output" to the quality of the "raw material." Such fetching metaphors are common in the professional literature of this period.

[14]Bowles, p. 147.

[15]Lester C. Thurow, "Education and Economic Equality," in Power and Ideology in Education, ed. Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey (New York: Oxford University Press), p. 325.

[16]Thurow, p. 328.

[17]Ivar E. Berg, Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 120.

[18]Persell, p. 159.

[19]Milner, p. 115. For Christopher Jencks, the relationship is more complex: "Economic success seems to depend on varieties of luck and on-the-job competence that are only moderately related to family background, schooling, or scores on standardized tests. The definition of competence varies greatly

from one job to another, but it seems in most cases to depend more on personality than on technical skills" [Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America (New York: Basic Books,1972)p.8.]

20 The question of upward mobility is a major problem in contemporary sociology. Humanists who venture into the fray without knowing statistical assumptions and techniques will likely encounter severe frustration. A standard work is Peter Blau, The American Occupational Structure (New York: Wiley, 1967). Jencks and Riseman note in The Academic Revolution (Garden City: Doubleday,1969) that "the best available evidence suggests that a man's chances of altering his father's position in the educational hierarchy were about the same in the 1950's as inthe 1920's" (p.84). This year the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights published a monograph of real importance: in Social Indicators of Equality for Minorities and Women (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing House, 1978) the Commission reviews data that measure the degree of improvement or decline inthe level of well-being of women and minorities. Briefly, they find that "the minority male and female rates of high school completion were about 65 to 85 percent of the rates for majority males in 1976. The completion rates...show a far far greater degree of disparity between majority males, majority females, and minority males and females. Except for the Asian American groups and majority females, the groups' rates do not even approach half the college completion rates of majority males" (p.16). Some groups, including Native Americans and black females, were even less likely in 1976 to have completed college than in 1970. Unemployment of minorities and women worsened in absolute and relative terms between 1960 and 1976 (p.29), and minorities who changed occupations between 1965 and 1970 were less upwardly mobile than majority males (p.45). As economic uncertainty persists or increases, one can expect privileged groups to cultivate more stringent devices for preserving privilege for themselves. See also note 28.

21 For an excellent review of the research on tracking, see Persell, pp. 85-99.

22 Jerome Karabel, "Community Colleges and Social Stratification: Submerged Class Conflict in American Higher Education, " in Power and Ideology in Education (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 235.

23 Karabel, pp. 238ff. See also note 25.

24 Karabel, p. 174.

25 See also Burton R. Clark, "The Cooling Out Function in Higher Education," American Journal of Sociology, 65 (May, 1960), 569-76. Jencks and Riesman argue that "given current tendency to siphon first-generation collegians into colleges with high attrition and second-generation collegians into colleges with low attrition, the overall attainment gap between children from different cultural backgrounds may well continue to widen for some time to come" (p.97). For more sanguine notions, see K. Patricia Cross, Accent on Learning(San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976) and Beyond the Open Door (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1971); John Roueche, A Modest Proposal (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1973); and Mina Shaughnessy, Errors and Expectations (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[26] Campbell R. McConnell, Economics: Principles, Problems, and Policies (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 6th Edition, pp. 103-104.

[27] At the height of the Depression, Lord Keynes speculated that in his grandchildren's day, all people might be rich and the people would "once more value ends above means and prefer the good to the useful..., But the time for all this is not yet. For at least another hundred years we must pretend to ourselves and to everyone that fair is foul and foul is fair; avarice and usury and precaution must be our gods for a little longer still. For only they can lead us out of the tunnel of economic necessity into daylight" [quoted in E. F. Schumacher, Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 24.] Keynes' gods, I hasten to add, are alive and well.

[28] The following tables on college attendance by family income and ability outline a more accurate view than McConnell provides.

College Attendance in 1967 Among High School Graduates by Family Income

Family Income	Percent who Did Not Attend
Under $ 3,000	80.2
$3,000 - $ 3,999	67.7
4,000 - 5,999	63.7
6,000 - 7,499	58.9
7,500 - 9,999	49
10,000 - 14,999	38.7
15,000+	13.3

Probability of College Entry for a Male Who Has Reached Grade 11

		Socioeconomic Quartiles			
	Low	Low 1	2	3	High 4
Ability Quartiles	1	.06	.12	.13	.26
	2	.13	.15	.29	.36
	3	.25	.34	.45	.65
	4	.48	.70	.73	.87

Percent Graduating College by Education of Father

	1920	1950
Sons of Elementary School Dropouts	5%	6%
Sons of College Entrants	28%	52%

These tables, their format slightly altered, are taken from Edward S. Greenberg, Serving the Few: Corporate Capitalism and the Bias of Government Policy (New York: Wiley, 1974), pp. 209-10. For more current data, the following table, taken from Social Indicators of Equality for Minorities and Women (1978), provide gloomy confirmation of the trends I outline:

College Completion

	Raw Measure[a]			Social Indicator Values (Ratios of raw measures to the majority male population)		
	1960	1970	1976	1960	1970	1976
Males						
Amer. Ind./Alask. Nat.	03	08	08	.15	.36	.24*
Blacks	04	06	11	.20	.27	.32
Mexican Americans	04	05	11	.20	.23	.32
Japanese Americans	35	39	53	1.75	1.77	1.56
Chinese Americans	49	58	60	2.45	2.64	1.76
Pilipino Americans	19	28	34	.95	1.27	1.00
Puerto Ricans	04	04	06	.20	.18	.18
Majority	20	22	34	1.00	1.00	1.00
Females						
Amer. Ind./Alask. Nat.	02	05	04	.10	.23	.12
Blacks	06	08	11	.30	.36	.32
Mexican Americans	02	03	05	.10	.14	.15
Japanese Americans	13	31	35	.65	1.41	1.03
Chinese Americans	26	42	44	1.30	1.91	1.29
Pilipino Americans	16	50	51	.80	2.27	1.50
Puerto Ricans	01	03	04	.05	.14	.12
Majority	09	14	22	.45	.64	.65

[a] The percentage of persons from 25 to 29 years of age who have completed at least 4 years of college.

* This can be interpreted as follows: "In 1976 the college completion rate for American Indian and Alaskan Natives male was 24 percent of (or 76 percent below) the rate for majority males."

29

The distribution of income and wealth has not changed significantly since the early part of this century,not withstanding (or perhaps because of) the power of Keynes' gods, avarice and usury. Using slightly different sources for their data, Greenberg and Persell provide this picture:

Distribution of Before-Tax Family Income

	Poorest 20%	Second 20%	Middle 20%	Fourth 20%	Top 20%
1947	5%	12%	17%	23%	43%
1960	5	12	18	24	42
1969	6	12	18	23	41
1972	5	11	18	24	43

Percentage of National Personal Income

	Highest 20 Percent	Lowest 20%
1910	47%	8%
1929	51	5
1937	49	4
1947	48	4
1953	46	4
1959	45	4

(From Greenberg, pp. 132-33.)

In 1975, according to the U. S. Bureau of Census, this pattern prevailed:

Highest 20 Percent:	Income: 41%
	Wealth: 76%
Middle 20 Percent	Income: 17.6%
	Wealth: 6.2%
Lowest 20 Percent	Income: 5.4%
	Wealth: 0.2%

(From Persell, p. 22; see also Jencks, Inequality, pp. 209-246). While rags-to-riches stories abound and provide some people with existential validity in their discussions of upward mobility, they do not obscure the grim fact that education has not been an efficient mechanism for equalizing income, wealth, or the perquisites of privilege. In The Illusion of Equality, Milner studies the effects of federal financial aid policies on educational opportunity for the poor and concludes that "although some forms of financial aid will affect social mobility to a limited degree, no form of aid will change the patterns of mobility sufficiently to have significant effects either on equality of opportunity or on equality in the societal stratification system" (p. 68). It does not require much statistical acumen to project the patterns of income distribution--and such correlates as health care, longevity, career choice, and so on -- a half century into the future, where it is safe to infer that

barring calamitous economic dislocations or disastrous military miscalculations, the distribution of wealth in 2029 will be identical to the present pattern.

[30]Raven McDavid, Jr., "Historical, Regional, and Social Variation," in Culture, Class, and Language Variety, ed. A. L. Davis (Urbana: NCTE, 1972), p. 15.

[31]Charles C. Fries, American English Grammar (New York: Appleton-Century, 1940), p. 13.

[32]Einar Haugen, "Dialect, Language, and Nation," American Anthropologist, 68 (August, 1966), 933.

[33]Frederick Williams, "Language, Attitude, and Social Change," in Language and Poverty, ed. Frederick Williams (Chicago: Markham, 1970), p. 381.

[34]A. D. Edwards, Language in Culture and Class (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 67. It is also important to note that teachers (and scholars) who most strongly believe in "upward mobility" are likely to have experienced it in their own careers (see note 5, for example). Thus, the concept may have a powerful existential validity even though it lacks strong empirical support. Dan C. Lortie observes that 30% of the teachers in an NEA survey came from blue-collar homes, which makes teaching a major route into the middle class (p. 35), though this is more true for men than for women. In a survey of Chicago public school teachers in 1960, it was found that 50% were from blue-collar families. Teachers who "make it" despite their social origins may likely become gatekeepers, particularly in their notions about standard English. See Lortie, Schoolteacher: A Sociological Survey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Michael Betz and James Garland, "Intergenerational Mobility Rates of Urban School Teachers," Sociology of Education (Fall, 1974), 51-22; Burton J. Bledstein, The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America (New York: Norton, 1976); and Edgar Z. Friedenberg, The Vanishing Adolescent (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 67.

[35]See Williams, "Language, Attitude, and Social Change"; Andrew Wilkinson, The Foundation of Language (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Howard Giles and Peter F. Powesland, Speech Style and Social Evaluation (London: Academic Press, 1975); William Labov, The Social Stratification of English in New York City (Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1966); Peter Trudgill, The Social Differentiation of English in Norwich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Millicent Poole, Social Contrasts in Linguistic, Cognitive, and Verbal Domains (Melbourne: Center for the Study of Urban Education, 1975); E. G. Chachere and V. D. King, "How" You Say Is What You Are: A Study of Adolescent Language Valuation, 1976, ED 140326. The research findings by British, Australian, and American scholars are remarkably consistent despite variation in research design and the types of language they examine.

36

For a review of the research on the effects of teachers' expectations on student achievement, see Persell, pp. 101-34. She concludes that "(1) teachers are more likely to hold negative expectations for lower-class and minority children than for middle-class and white children.... (2) Teacher expectations are affected by testing and tracking, procedures which are themselves biased against lower-class and minority children.... (3) It is precisely such information that... is more potent in its consequences than positive expectations. (4) Expectations are related to teacher behaviors and to student cognitive changes even when pupil IQ and achievement are controlled. (5) Given the less powerful position of lower-class and minority children in society, they appear to be more influenced by teacher expectations" (p. 132). See also the exemplary review of studies on language style and social judgement in Giles and Powesland, pp. 246ff.

37

See William Labov, "Systematically Misleading Data from Test Questions," The Urban Review, 9, 3 (Fall, 1976), 146-69 and Clarence J. Karier, "Testing for Order and Control in the Corporate State," Educational Theory, 22 (Spring, 1972), 154-80. A. D. Edwards concludes that "a single 'standard' measuring rod is manifestly unfair to children from ethnic or other minority groups, who need tests oriented directly to their speech community or to features (e.g., possession, location, passivation) common to different language systems.... Otherwise the tests are measures of acculturation, not of basic linguistic skills. The children are not being asked how well they have learned their language, but how well they have learned something else" (p. 122).

38

A. M. Keipe, The Effects of Instruction Upon Children's Attitudes toward Regional Dialects (Diss., 1977).

39

William Labov's work is extremely important in this regard. In Social Class, Language, and Education (new York: Schocken, 1968), Denis Lawton provides an extensive exegesis of Basil Bernstein's very influential work, though Lawton provides no evidence that confirms Bernstein's hypothesis about the twin language codes. In Language in Culture and Class (London: Heinemann, 1976), A. D. Edwards is properly skeptical about Bernstein and provides a useful survey of the sociology of language (pp. 81-122).

40

Labov, "The Logic of Nonstandard English," in Language and Poverty ed. Frederick Williams (Chicago: Markham, 1970), p. 163.

41

See pp. 85ff.

42

Loban, p. 86. This view of the inherent superiority of middle-class styles of speech permeates much research. Denis Lawton, for example, argues that middle-class values and language usage should be transmitted to working-class children as part of their "education." It is a simple fact, he argues, sounding much like Cubberley at the beginning of this century, "that traditional working class socialization processes

are preparing its young members for a world which is disappearing: in the near future routine manual jobs are going to disappear and jobs which will become available in industry or in bureaucratic welfare or distribution spheres will require a much higher level of symbolic control" (Social Class, Language, and Education, p. 159). In teaching language, Lawton argues, the schools would--and should--destroy working-class culture, colonizing working-class children into the values and assumptions and language of the middle-class. Jack would be a gentleman if he could speak "network" standard. For an historical survey of the development of "school English" in America, see Evelyn C. Wright, School English and Social Order: Nineteenth Century Background to the Work of the Committee of Ten and its Work on English (Diss., 1977). Jencks and Riesman maintain that the diffusion of middle-class values and language depend on the actual availability of attractive opportunities to the children from lower-class families (p. 87). Rasselas would have enjoyed the chance to debate their remarks that downward mobility is "usually more painful than blocked upward mobility" (p. 149), for these sociologists clinch their argument by referring to the sum total of human happiness.

43 Richard Ohmann, English in America: A Radical View of the Profession (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).